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SUBJECT: SOME NORTH KIVU IDP'S RETURNING, OTHERS LEAVING AS
NEW CONCERNS EMERGE

¶1. (U) Summary: More than 46,000 Congolese displaced by the November-December fighting in North Kivu province have returned to their homes, according to OCHA officials. However, an estimated 24,000 new IDPs have fled out of fears of new fighting arising from operation launched against FDLR and Mayi-Mayi forces in the region. Refugee officials say many others remain unable to return because Congolese military (FARDC) forces and their families have appropriated their homes and fields. End summary.

¶2. (U) Patrick Lavand'homme, director of OCHA-North Kivu, told visiting PolOff February 6 that the number of IDPs remaining from November-December 2006 fighting in the province has fallen sharply as of early February. Lavand'homme estimates the number of IDPs is around 62,000, down from a peak of 120,000 immediately after the fighting around Sake. More than 46,000 people have returned to Rutshuru territory, north of the provincial capital of Goma, according to OCHA figures. UNHCR reports there are another 1,155 registered as refugees in Uganda and 2,611 in Rwanda.

¶3. (U) In the areas of Jomba and Tongo, where some of the heaviest fighting took place in December 2006, OCHA reports that nearly 90 percent of IDPs have returned to their homes. Lavand'homme said he believed IDPs are returning because they view the December ceasefire between dissident General Laurent Nkunda and the FARDC as providing adequate security and safety. He cautioned that returns could slow in the coming weeks because of fears related to the deployment of Nkunda loyalists throughout the province in the new mixed FARDC brigades.

¶4. (U) Lavand'homme said despite the large number of returnees to these locations, a new wave of IDPs has appeared in northwestern Rutshuru territory. He estimated that 24,000 people have fled in expectation of new fighting around the towns of Kikuku, Nyanzale and Kibrizi. Lavand'homme said his office has received reports that these IDPs left after the new mixed Alpha Brigade was deployed to the area in early January. (Note: Alpha is a combination of Nkunda loyalists and pro-government non-integrated FARDC troops mixed into one unified brigade, as agreed to in the December ceasefire accords between Nkunda and the GDRC. End note.) He reported that new IDPs have said they expect Bravo to begin military operations against the FDLR and Mayi-Mayi forces and were thus moving away from possible conflict areas.

¶5. (U) Fewer IDPs have returned to the town of Sake, 15 miles northwest of Goma, where the November fighting began. Lavand'homme said many homes there are still occupied by FARDC soldiers and their families from the non-integrated 110th, 116th, and 1st Reserve Brigades and are scheduled to be consolidated into the new mixed brigades. These units were

deployed to the region from South Kivu in December after the conflict started. IDP families are reportedly afraid to return to Sake because of the soldiers' continued presence.

¶6. (U) Lavand'homme reported that the wives of some FARDC soldiers are cultivating the abandoned crops in Sake and selling them in Goma markets. He said there is a long-term concern about disturbances in the agricultural cycle and the effect on food security, as February and March are harvest months. Lavand'homme said the UN Food and Agriculture Office plans to initiate a seed and tool distribution program but added the security situation makes it unlikely farmers will have access to their fields.

¶7. (U) Comment: North Kivu's IDP situation remains delicate. Long-term political solutions are necessary to create a durable security environment that will permit IDPs to return home. Possible combat operations between the FARDC and the FDLR will cause tens of thousands to be displaced, further disrupting the province's security and economy. End comment.
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